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## THE SOCIAL TEACHING OF PAUL.

### VIII. WEALTH AND THE STATE.

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THE years in which Christianity first began its history were years of prodigious economic and political change. The growth of the Roman republic had of necessity broken down and established trade routes quite as truly as it had recombined kingdoms into the first empire. Commercial intercourse between Asia and Africa was supplemented by the enormous traffic between cities like Alexandria, Antioch, Tarsus, Ephesus, Corinth, Marseilles, and Rome. Industries were developed to the very limits allowed by slavery. Enormous banking houses sprang up all over the empire; Judea itself, after having for centuries shared but little in the economic life of its neighbors, then sought its place in the world-commerce. At the same time there was an extraordinary redistribution of wealth. The enormous booty of the eastern wars at first had fallen into the hands of a few wealthy Romans. The standard of living set by them had controlled the habits of the wealthy classes throughout the provinces, and in consequence there, as in the capital itself, ruinous prodigality was soon epidemic. Uninvested wealth is pretty certain to find its way into the hands of middlemen, and the Roman empire offered no exception to the rule. Shopkeepers grew into capitalists; slaves into freedmen; freedmen into millionaires. The entire age grew commercial.

At the same time it grew imperial. The multitude of small kingdoms and city-states that had composed the ancient world had become things of the past, and in their stead there had arisen the ever-developing empire. For the first time in human history the civilized world was at peace with itself, and united against the barbarians of the forests of Europe, the steppes of Asia, and the plains of Arabia and Africa. It was impossible

for the imagination of any thoughtful man to rest unstirred. So it was that there seems to have arisen throughout the empire bands of men who sought either to carry the political transformation still farther, or to check the progress of a movement toward the complete centralization of power in an irresponsible monarch. So much, at least, looks out upon us through the stern regulations of the age against all sorts of sodalities. "Societies of this sort," wrote Trajan to the younger Pliny who had recommended forming a fire company in Nicomedia,<sup>1</sup> "have greatly disturbed the peace of the province. Whatever name we give them, and for whatever purposes they may be founded, they will not fail to form themselves into factious assemblies, however short their meetings may be." The same danger Trajan discovered in large meetings called to receive contributions of money.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the entire legislative and imperial rescripts a similar fear of political disturbance is evident. To speak against Cæsar was the worst of crimes.

Into this commercial empire Christianity came, with a message that from the point of view of the empire itself must have been suspicious. It taught another king, Jesus,<sup>3</sup> and it sought to make its followers live as if citizens of another kingdom. As long as such teachings were seen through the medium of a highly protected Judaism, they might very well pass among the Romans as a part of the impossible religion of the Jews; but when once Christians left the synagogues and made devotion to their king and kingdom the supreme test of loyalty to their own fraternities, it is clear that Roman officialism could not fail to be alarmed. To adjust the new life of the church to an aggressive commercialism, and at the same time to preserve it from being misconceived as a political movement, were problems requiring no small sagacity.

Yet, after all, from the point of view occupied by Paul, its solution was not difficult. The new value given life by eschatological messianism, the spirit of *laissez-faire* in politics which obtained in his pharisaic training, suggested at once the conduct to be advised. How opposed to anything savoring of revolution

<sup>1</sup> PLINY, *Letters*, xliii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 17:7.

this conduct should be has already appeared. We have now to examine the positive teachings of the apostle concerning the ethical principles obtaining in economic and political matters.

#### SECTION I. WEALTH.

The teaching of Jesus upon wealth was set forth in language which might be easily misunderstood to indicate hostility to wealth as such. He realized the moral difficulties which lie in the possession of property, and, above all, the constant temptation of the rich man to grow independent and superior to his fellows. It was because of this that he so insisted upon the fraternal use of property. It is true that his teaching is not strictly economic. Doubtless because of the circumstances of the time in which he lived, beyond saying that one cannot serve both it and God, and that one is to seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, he has left no utterance concerning the matter of the production or, strictly speaking, the distribution of wealth. He was rather concerned with its consumption. But even here his words are not those of the economist, but of the moralist. Indeed, he has left no economic program. In the case of wealth, as in the case of all human matters, he is concerned with moral relations, and it is from this point of view that his words have permanent value. With Jesus wealth is a good, but a secondary good. By being used in the spirit of love, and for the purpose of building up a fraternal humanity, it gains its only worth.<sup>4</sup> And this means that it should be given freely and as one is confronted with others' needs.<sup>5</sup> In fact, so strong are his expressions concerning the duty of charity that, were it not for the corrective of his other and more general teachings concerning love, one might be justified in adopting the interpretation of his words so often championed, that Jesus taught that all wealth should be given away. Interpreted in their genetic relations with the fundamental principles of his teaching, however, these injunctions to charity appear in their

<sup>4</sup> Luke 16: 1 ff.

<sup>5</sup> For instance, Luke 6:30; 12:33; Mark 10:21. In general see MATHEWS, *Social Teaching of Jesus*, chap. 6; PEABODY, *Jesus Christ and the Social Question*, chap 4; ROGGE, *Der irdische Besitz im Neuen Testament*.

true light. They are the one application of such principles to the historical conditions in which Jesus found himself. And as such charity reappeared in the apostolic fraternity.

For one cannot be far from the truth in holding that it was the recollection of their manner of life with Jesus a few months previous that led the apostles in the early days of the Jerusalem church to favor the continuance of an arrangement in which no limits were set upon the devotion of wealth to the needs of the community. And thence resulted the outgush of Christian love which led to the sale of land and other property, and the devotion of the proceeds to the maintenance of a common fund which was devoted to supplying the needs of poor Christians.<sup>6</sup>

Many<sup>7</sup> have seen in this spontaneous *κοινωνία*, in which, as one of the two accounts of Acts says, no one thought of his own property as his own,<sup>8</sup> a form of communism. It is very difficult for one who would use words accurately to assent to such an opinion. Communism consists in something more than self-sacrificing charity. If words mean anything, to give one's coat to a tramp is not to constitute oneself a disciple of Fourier. No more were the Christians at Jerusalem communists because they ministered to their poor. There is not the slightest indication that they ever united in a common productive effort, ever uttered a word against the institution of private property, or gave their assent to any peculiar theory of the distribution of wealth. The situation was much simpler. These Christian messianists expected that their Lord was soon to come to establish his heavenly kingdom. This faith constituted a bond of union both with Jesus and with each other. They were brethren. Some of their number were in need of assistance. It was but an expression of the fraternal love which characterized the new life when those who had property should minister to their less fortunate brothers. The time in which

<sup>6</sup> There is no need of supposing that the entire membership of the church sat down to a common meal. The numbers, as well as Acts 2:46, preclude this.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, NITTI, *Catholic Socialism*, p. 62. A number of quotations are given in PEABODY, *op. cit.*, p. 26, note.

<sup>8</sup> Acts 4:32; cf. 3:44, 45. In the *Didache*, 4:8, and in the *Epistle of Barnabas*, 19:8, this statement becomes a command.

property would be of use was rapidly shortening, and for that reason, if for no other, wealth might well be put to its best use. Such an explanation so satisfies all the conditions that it seems almost supererogation to call attention to the fact that the mother of Mark seems to have owned her house,<sup>9</sup> and that in the story of Ananias and Sapphira, whatever may be its historical value, there is no evidence that its writer supposed that in the Christian church there was ever any compulsory charity.<sup>10</sup> The two wretches die as liars, not as breakers of a communistic compact.

But even such consistent, if indeed, under the belief of his speedy return, too literal, following of the teaching of Jesus was but short-lived in the church. His words were interpreted to refer to charity rather than to general economic life, and charity became throughout the different Christian communities what it has since become—a giving of a certain portion of one's income to the poor, chiefly those, doubtless, at Jerusalem. Wherever one can trace Paul there one can also discover his indefatigable effort to raise money for poor Christians.<sup>11</sup> However much this effort may have depended upon some politic motive, like maintaining the good-will of otherwise proselyting Jewish Christians,<sup>12</sup> there can be no question as to the importance he accords charity as a Christian virtue. The very common meals furnished the poor of the Jerusalem church were perpetuated in the meals of the Græco-Roman churches like Corinth.<sup>13</sup> It is true that this meal soon became symbolical rather than eleemosynary, the expression of a fraternal unity rather than of charity; but even thus its origin does not seem to have been quite forgotten, for alongside of the memorial supper there seems also to have been a more substantial meal. In other ways, also, the teachings of Jesus upon charity seem to have received especial attention. Paul admonishes the elders of Ephesus not to forget their Lord's word, "It is more blessed to give than to

<sup>9</sup> Acts 12:12.

<sup>10</sup> Acts 5:1-11.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Thess. 4:11; Rom. 15:26-33; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 1:8 ff.; 8:4; 9:1 ff.; Gal. 2:10.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 16:1, 3; 2 Cor. 9:1.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:24.

receive"<sup>14</sup> and the poor-fund raised in his churches seems to have been sufficiently large to warrant a system of treasurers like Tychicus and Trophimus.<sup>15</sup>

Yet there is no suggestion that Paul thought it necessary for all his converts to beggar themselves in order to assist others from beggary. "Let thine alms sweat within thy hands until thou knowest to whom thou art giving it," says the *Didache*,<sup>16</sup> and Paul was quite as much opposed to indiscriminate charity. He insisted that the Christian should keep within the ranks of the wealth-producers. "We hear," he wrote the Thessalonians, "of some that walk among you disorderly, that work not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus that with quietness they work and eat their own bread." "If any will not work, neither let him eat,"<sup>17</sup> he also commanded the Thessalonians, as if in the very spirit of modern philanthropy. In several of his letters<sup>18</sup> he recalls to the mind of his converts his own habit of life, how he worked daily in order that he might not become a burden to any, and that, too, while he distinctly recognizes his right along with other religious teachers to be supported by the community to which he ministered in spiritual things.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps at this point we find Paul in his most interesting position. The custom of the rabbis, and far more of the philosophers, favored the giving of presents to teachers. Thus, as a teacher, to say nothing of his being an apostle, he might have claimed the privilege of being supported by his disciples. This, as has already been said, he declined to do, but his declination was made in such form as really to strengthen the right of other teachers to be paid. Whether or not such persons had abandoned their ordinary vocations we cannot surely say, but probably they had. Only on this supposition can we account

<sup>14</sup> Acts 20 : 34, 35.

<sup>15</sup> Acts 20 : 4, 5 ; cf. Acts 24 : 17 ; Rom. 15 : 25, 26 ; Gal. 2 : 10. See RENDALL, *Expositor*, 1893, p. 321. The technical word for this contribution was *διακονία*.

<sup>16</sup> 1 : 6.

<sup>17</sup> 2 Thess. 3 : 10.

<sup>18</sup> 1 Thess. 2 : 9 ; 2 Thess. 3 : 7, 8 ; 1 Cor. 9 : 1-18 ; 2 Cor. 11 : 7 ; 12 : 13.

<sup>19</sup> 1 Thess. 5 : 12, 13 ; 2 Thess. 3 : 9 ; 1 Cor. 9 : 1-14.

for Paul's anxiety that those who were over his converts in the Lord and who ministered to them in spiritual things should be cared for in material things. The very Scriptures taught the lesson, he insisted, when they taught that a man was not to muzzle the ox that trod out his grain.

This insistence upon charity and self-support, as well as upon the payment of teachers, argues strongly for the presence in the early churches of others than those who were poor or essentially proletarian. And this conclusion is corroborated by many hints in the apostolic and subsequent literature, not to mention the archæological testimony of the second and third centuries. Poor there were, but also those who were well to do; possibly, since there seems to have been a city treasurer, even a few rich.

To appreciate, however, the general social status of the churches outside of Judea, at least, one must think of communities composed of small shopkeepers, artisans, slaves, all being kept by the influence of their leaders steadily at their daily toil, doing heartily whatever they undertook, as unto the Lord, and all contributing to some fund which was applied to the needs of the other "saints." It is certainly a charming picture of simplicity and generosity—the farthest possible removed, on the one side, from any communistic propaganda, and, on the other, from mere commercialism.

But the leaders of the early church, if devoted to sobriety, industry, and charity, were none the less suspicious of the rich. In Paul's later letters he repeatedly warns his converts against covetousness, likening it to idolatry,<sup>20</sup> and rigorously excluding the covetous, with fornicators and thieves and drunkards, from the heavenly kingdom.<sup>21</sup> And it is worth noticing that this suspicion of the rich did not pass away. The epistle to Timothy declares<sup>22</sup> that the love of money is the root of all evils, and the author of Hebrews<sup>23</sup> bids Christians to be free from the love of money. Far more severe is the author of the epistle of James, which, whether it represents pre-Pauline Christianity or not,

<sup>20</sup> Col. 3: 5.

<sup>22</sup> 1 Tim. 6: 10.

<sup>21</sup> 1 Cor. 5: 10, 11; 6: 11; Eph. 5: 5.

<sup>23</sup> 13: 5.



certainly represents the un-Pauline point of view. In all folk-literature there is no sterner denunciation of wealth or of that obsequiousness which even in the brotherhood of Christ gives special honors to the well-dressed and wealthy man. "Go to now, ye rich, weep and wail for your miseries that are coming upon you. Ye have laid up your treasure in the last days. Behold the hire of the laborers who mowed your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth out."<sup>24</sup> In these stern words we see, however, not merely a hostility to wealth as such, but to the unrighteous and oppressing rich; and it is noticeable that even here there is no word of revolution, but a trust in the retribution to come in the day of judgment.

Despite the progress of Christianity among the wealthier classes, confidence in the poor man as over against the rich man, and the desire that all men should give to charity, may be said to characterize the first century of the life of the church. Once we even seem to catch some echo of the old communal charity of the ancient church, when in the *Two Ways* we read:<sup>25</sup> "Thou shalt communicate in all things with thy neighbor; thou shalt not call things thine own: for if ye be partakers in common of things that are incorruptible, how much more should ye be of those things that are corruptible;" but the context makes it likely that the words urge only charity.

The church as a whole seems never to have committed itself to other than the Pauline view of industry, private property, and charity in proportion to God's prospering. By the time we reach the second century we find the church fathers discussing the paradoxical teachings of Jesus with much the spirit, and oftentimes with the same casuistry, as the writers of today, while a little later Chrysostom urges an academic communism on the ground that all money put into the common fund would be divinely increased!

If now we seek for the motives that induced the apostles thus to inveigh against wealth while urging industry and charity, they will all be found either within the traditions of those who had lived with Jesus, or else within the general messianic expectations

<sup>24</sup> Jas. 5:4.

<sup>25</sup> *Epistle of Barnabas*, 19.

of the early church. It is hardly possible to suppose that the churches which preserved the records of Jesus' teaching that go to make up our gospels should have been utterly indifferent to the repeated injunction of Jesus to make wealth a secondary good and to practice charity. Just as impossible is it not to perceive that the expectation of a speedy return of Jesus to establish an ideal but unearthly society would have tended inevitably to minimize the value set upon wealth. The leaders of the church, with remarkable exceptions like Augustine, have always seen a Christian use of property in the endowment of ecclesiastical institutions. But an endowment presupposes a permanent institution, and this was just what the eschatology of the apostles made impossible. Their charity funds were for immediate consumption, not for permanent investments. Even the apostolic injunction to industry was primarily called out by an indifference to earthly conditions born of the eschatological hope. To erect the apostolic teaching into legislation is therefore impossible. As a whole, it is not even the expression of fundamental principles. Yet none the less—perhaps one should say all the more—is it valuable, for it discloses one fundamental fact, viz.: *Christianity has no economic program.* And another great fact emerges from the apostolic treatment of a commercial age: Economics, like all other aspects of life, is to be controlled by love—love that helps the less fortunate; love that refuses to judge a man by his possession or lack of wealth; love that refuses to make its possessor become through idleness a burden upon society.

But these are not rules. They are the elements of a Christianity that is dependent upon no theory of the second coming of Christ, or upon any formal messianism. Essential Christianity needs no such motives, and may even thrive better without them, for it is an expression of the new life that is born from the contact of a soul with its God, and is nourished and directed by the life and teaching of Jesus.

#### SECTION II. THE STATE.

The conservative spirit shown by the apostle in the matter of wealth is even more marked in regard to politics. Jesus had

left no teaching regarding the state. The nearest approach he made to the matter was his general reply to the Jews, to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's;<sup>26</sup> and to Pilate: "Thou couldest have no power except it were given thee from above."<sup>27</sup> Any man who attempts to erect a theory of politics upon two such statements will need considerable imagination, and deserves small credence. The fact is that in politics Jesus adopted a thoroughgoing policy of *laissez-faire*, refusing to complicate his real purpose in life with any consideration of political difficulties or reforms.

The same general attitude seems to have characterized the teaching of the primitive church. It is true that, as far as one can judge from the early sections of Acts, the first Christians judged that they were free to disobey the commands of the authorities whenever they interfered with what seemed to them to be clearly Christian duty,<sup>28</sup> but Jesus himself may be said by implication to have countenanced the same view, when he foretold to his disciples that they would be brought before kings and governors, for his sake, and promised them the aid of the Spirit in making their defense.<sup>29</sup> But the persecutions which came upon the church at Jerusalem were not so severe as to lead to any distinct attitude of hostility on the part of the Christians, either to the Roman or to the Jewish officials.

Paul seems to have had a good knowledge of law, both imperial and, if one may judge from the niceties of his references in his letter to the Galatians, local. He also, doubtless, realized the difficulties which beset the man who could be represented as in any way dangerous to the Roman empire. Yet he knew the advantage of Roman citizenship, and, from one point of view, the entire book of Acts is an argument for the legitimacy of Christianity because of the repeated protection shown Paul by various Roman officials. Perhaps it is in part for this reason that he seems to have been remarkably courteous in his references to the imperial power. He tells the Romans that the state

<sup>26</sup> Matt. 22 : 18-22.

<sup>27</sup> John 19 : 11. In general see MATHEWS, *Social Teaching of Jesus*, chap. 5.

<sup>28</sup> See the words of Peter and John, in Acts 4 : 19.

<sup>29</sup> Mark 13 : 9-11.

is of divine origin,<sup>30</sup> and that it is to be obeyed implicitly under fear of just punishment: "Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers: for there is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God." "For for this cause ye pay tribute also; for they are ministers of God's service, attending continually upon this very thing." And this of an emperor like Nero! At the same time, Paul clearly believed that all governments were but temporary, and that the rulers of this age, both Jewish and Roman,<sup>31</sup> were to come to nought.<sup>32</sup> His attitude in general was not in the least, therefore, that of co-operation with the state, but that of submission to its requirements. In fact, he does not, apparently, think that the state is a matter in which the Christian has any particular share. This appears clearly in his strong words to the Corinthians against going into heathen courts, with their interfraternal troubles. The state might be appealed to for protection, but never to decide the differences of Christians.<sup>33</sup> It was bad enough that there should be dissensions within the Christian brotherhood, but they should be settled within the Christian community "by some wise man able to judge between brothers." Christians should never appear before the heathen judges to plead their difficulties with each other. "Do you not know," he asks indignantly, as he recalls them to their messianic hopes, "that the saints are to judge angels?"<sup>34</sup> and that "men who are unjust cannot inherit the kingdom of God?"

Here again we evidently have teaching that can be adjusted only to certain distinct historical conditions. Paul is not drawing out a theory of the state. He is endeavoring to show his converts how to live in an existing empire while waiting for the coming of the Lord. To elevate it into anything else is to be untrue to historical conditions. It is not that all government is *right*; it is simply a divinely ordered element of a period of waiting. The true Christian citizenship was not in earth, but in heaven. The heavenly kingdom was not to be set up on the earth by any transformation of the Roman empire. It was to come suddenly, miraculously. Had Paul returned to life at the beginning of the

<sup>30</sup> Rom. 13:1-7.

<sup>32</sup> 1 Cor. 2:6; 15:24; cf. Acts 17:7.

<sup>31</sup> 1 Thess. 2:16; Rom. 9:22; 11:1-36.

<sup>33</sup> Acts 28:19.

<sup>34</sup> 1 Cor. 6:1 ff.

fourth century, there could have been no more surprised man than he upon reading the proclamation of Constantine. Persecution he could understand, for it was to be expected that an evil age would pursue the followers of the Christ it had killed;<sup>35</sup> but an earthly government gradually recognizing the civil rights of both Christians and heathen, with Christian officials and Christian legislation, was something of which he never dreamed. It was, in fact, something of which few Christians dreamed for two centuries after the apostle's death.

It is obvious, therefore, that we cannot regard the apostolic teaching concerning the state as of lasting significance. So to treat it would be to end political evolution. To submit to governmental oppression has been often the most un-Christian of acts, and Paul himself was to fall a victim to his own refusal to allow his rule of passive obedience to extend over matters of conscience. The paradox of the political significance of Christianity never was more striking. On the one hand stand these directions of the apostle to submit to the imperial power, and on the other is the manifest fact that Christianity, in the same degree as it has been unaffected by tradition and authority, has always made toward political change. How may the paradox be resolved? By a resort to the facts which condition the teaching. It is inconceivable that Paul should have thus taught, had he perceived a social and political future before Christianity. It was because he believed in the cataclysm attending the return of Jesus that he urged the Christians to hold aloof from the state. Once remove or disabuse one of this belief, and his teaching is impracticable. And this is precisely what happened in the process of time. The Christ did not return; Christianity could not hold itself from politics.

Has, then, Paulinism no political significance? Before a categorical answer is given one may well decide as to which Paulinism is meant: that which deals with the principles of a religious ethic, or that which deals with the specific application of such principles to an age believed to be rapidly moving toward its end. But the answer in either case is the same. If

<sup>35</sup> 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14, 15.

the latter is meant, Paulinism had a political message for its own day; but that message passed with its day. To reinforce it would mean the triumph of tyranny. If the former is meant, then Paulinism has no specific political message beyond the teaching of Jesus. And this is to say that it has none. Christianity in the teaching of its great apostle, as in that of its Founder, is a life and not a system. It may have political effects; it cannot have a political program. A government is Christian, not when it is a republic rather than a monarchy, or a monarchy rather than a republic; or when its subjects are either indifferents or martyrs. It is Christian when its institutions embody the spirit and are regulated by the principles of Jesus. And that this may be true, revolutions, despite Paul's words to the Roman church, may sometimes be the most sacred of Christian duties.

Thus again it is easy by a resolution of its historical form to discover the fundamental ethic of Pauline Christianity. Its highest good is the living of the eternal life of the Spirit, and its highest imperative is born of the need of living according to the measure of that life already possessed.